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## Transforming Shakespeare: Neil Gaiman and The Sandman

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*William is new to comics, but we think he did a fantastic job helping Neil with our play-within-a-play's dialogue. We would ordinarily predict great things ahead for this hot British talent, but, unfortunately, he died over three centuries ago. Too bad; he might have written the definitive Batman story.*

—Tom Peyer, Assistant Editor of *The Sandman*

William Shakespeare may be the most canonized name in English literature, providing both literary education and dramatic entertainment for over four hundred years. His plays remain a cornerstone of theater and modern media; film versions of the plays date from the earliest silent movies. Both cinema and theater have often sought to modernize and reinterpret his plays, and this interest has now extended into the alteration and adaptation of all things Shakespearean (as in films such as Gil Junger's *Ten Things I Hate About You* and John Madden's *Shakespeare in Love*). With such renewed interest feeding from popular culture back into literary scholarship, the man and his works live on in both spheres.

Alongside cinematic adaptations, Shakespearean plays have been recreated in comics, such as the Manga Shakespeare series (published by Self-MadeHero). However, perhaps their most interesting appearance within this medium was the incorporation of two plays into Neil Gaiman's award-winning fantasy series *The Sandman*, the flagship title used by American publishers DC Comics to launch its Vertigo imprint. The titular Sandman, Morpheus (also known as Dream of the Endless), is a member of the

dysfunctional family of the Endless, deities older than gods who represent the functions of Death, Destiny, Dream, Destruction, Desire, Despair, and Delirium (who used to be Delight). On one level *The Sandman* is a *Bildungsroman* tale (referring to the formative years of Morpheus, whose humanization underlies the series), but on another the comic is simply one about storytelling: like dreaming itself, it is a vehicle for fantasy tales.

"A Midsummer Night's Dream" (*The Sandman* #19) and "The Tempest" (*The Sandman* #75) were two of three issues in the series to feature art by acclaimed fantasy artist Charles Vess.<sup>1</sup> "A Midsummer Night's Dream" follows on from *The Sandman* #13 ("Men of Good Fortune"), in which Shakespeare makes a Faustian bargain with Morpheus "TO GIVE MEN DREAMS, THAT WOULD LIVE ON LONG AFTER I AM DEAD" (Gaiman, "Men" 6.12.3).<sup>2</sup> In exchange for such a gift, Shakespeare agrees to write two plays specifically for Morpheus, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*. The former tells the story of four lovers lost in a wood outside Athens, whose misadventures over the course of one night are first complicated and then resolved by fairy interference. The latter is set on an island ruled by the exiled Duke Prospero, whose magical skills and fairy aides ultimately enable him to restore his kingdom and escape his island with his daughter Miranda when his usurpers are shipwrecked on his shores.<sup>3</sup>

Set in the Sussex countryside on 23 June 1593, *The Sandman* #19 tells the story of the first performance of *Dream* by Lord Strange's Men to an audience that includes Morpheus, Auberon, Titania, and the rest of the "faerie folk."<sup>4</sup> This allows Gaiman to situate "real" versions of the play's characters and events alongside their actor counterparts. Despite their misgivings, Shakespeare's troupe perform for their strange audience, but during the course of the play Titania steals Shakespeare's son, Hamnet; the mischievous Puck takes over his role from the actor Dick Cowlley; and the actors wake the next day with no more than dead leaves (rather than faerie gold) for their troubles.

*The Sandman* #75, the last issue of the series, returns us to an aged Shakespeare now living in Stratford and writing his final play, the plot of which draws upon literature, events from his life, and daily incidents. The poet Ben Jonson visits him and together the two compose the doggerel "Remember remember the fifth of November." Shakespeare falls asleep over the final pages of *The Tempest* and in so doing delivers the play to Morpheus in *The Dreaming* (Morpheus's realm), also sharing a glass of wine with him in his parlor to mark the end of his service. Shakespeare wakes with relief, saying he can now lay down what he calls "THE BURDEN OF WORDS" (Gaiman, "Tempest" 183.5), but realizes he must now write the play's epilogue alone, which he does.

Public perception of both the comic book medium and the genre of fantasy means that, like many contemporary cinematic productions, Gaiman's rewriting can be said to return these plays to the realm of popular culture. However, his versions do not simply modernize or update the plays; instead, many of their events and motifs are doubled in the framing story that Gaiman creates, such as Titania's theft of the Indian Boy/Hamnet or the commentary provided on *Pyramus and Thisbe/Dream* by their respective audiences. This not only sustains the plays' traditional interpretations and performance legacies (the subsequent body of work in all its various forms), but also incorporates them into a broad discussion of the nature of literary creation. In this sense *The Sandman* transforms Shakespeare's works into a metafiction that comments both on his life and on the nature of literary creation and storytelling as, for example, in "The Tempest" where the characters of Morpheus and Prospero are aligned with the island as sites of literary creation.

Shakespeare is a popular subject for appropriation and it first seems relevant to situate *The Sandman* with respect to other contemporary adaptations. While Shakespearean plays remain in the theater, and in this context may still attract an elitist label, it must be remembered that this medium was a popular entertainment venue for mass audiences in its day. As such, Shakespeare's adoption by popular culture is equally relevant to the performance legacy of these plays.

Early films offer an idyllic interpretation of *Dream*, for example, by featuring an entirely female fairy cast (the Vitagraph film of 1909, directed by Blackton and Kent) or an abundance of balletic fairies (in the 1935 adaptation by Reinhardt and Dieterle). This type of spectacle is traditionally associated with *Dream*, but it would not have been relevant at the time of the play's creation in the 1590s; Professor Christopher McCullough notes that these images owe more "to the imagination of a Victorian children's illustrator than they do to the Elizabethan mind" (108). Modernized productions of the play that are aimed at popular, contemporary audiences may have more in common with the original performances than do those perceived as "traditional." For example, rather than exploring the issues of patriarchy that were relevant in Elizabeth I's reign, the 2005 BBC series *Shakespeare Retold* follows this path by updating *Dream* to refer to today's divorce crisis (directed by Ed Fraiman, the story is set at a British holiday camp and focuses on saving the marriage of "Polly" and "Theo"). A similar theme is also apparent in *The Sandman*, which hints at an affair between Titania and Morpheus (Bender 79). While updates such as these may seem to separate modern versions from the Shakespearean text, in using the newest entertainment media and adopting contemporary dress and language,

they actually bring the work closer to Shakespeare's tone than does the "traditional" Victorian model.

Similarly, Percy Stow's 1908 silent movie of *The Tempest* is easily the most visually imaginative and adventurous of the *Silent Shakespeare* collection, using location footage and elaborate tableaux. However, in locating Prospero's island as a literal rocky outcrop, the film bypasses the metaphorical value of the setting as either a peripheral space (dislocated from reality and geographically isolated from the world at large) or as the mental landscape of Prospero. By contrast, more radical interpretations such as *Forbidden Planet* (McLeod Wilcox 1956) do engage with the play's colonial themes by using a remote territory (the planet Altair-4), whose natives are extinct and upon which Dr. Morbius (Prospero) and his daughter have settled. Other films, such as Derek Jarman's *The Tempest* (1979), privilege the psychological subtext of authorial control by reinterpreting the events of the tale as Prospero's dream and characters such as Caliban as repressed elements of his personality. As noted, *The Sandman* similarly aligns the figures of Morpheus, Prospero, and the island, and metaphors such as these both invoke and comment on the play's content.

Period costume is often used in Shakespearean drama to comment extra-textually—from outside the text—on the play in question: for example by indicating its Elizabethan origins. Visual coding thereby takes place both inside and outside the fiction of the play, as costume may indicate character function (for example, in *Dream* by contrasting a dowdy Helena with a glamorous Hermia) but also may allude to the play's cultural origins (since the dress, music, and setting used in versions of *Dream* are often Elizabethan rather than Grecian). Such productions therefore have an implicit frame of Elizabethan heritage, even though this is only referenced obliquely, for example, in Michael Hoffman's *Dream* (1999). This Hollywood version also offers a different set of intertextual relations around actors and their characters. Judith Buchanan has described this relationship as "textual penumbra," the attachment of an actor's reputation or body of work to her latest role; for example Calista Flockhart's famous role as Ally McBeal informs our reception of her role as the lovesick Helena in Hoffman's *Dream* (140). This type of coding can also be seen in films such as *Shakespeare in Love* (where Joseph Fiennes glamorizes the character of Shakespeare into a lover) and also makes up part of the intertextuality of *Dream*'s tradition. Although comics make no use of actors, *The Sandman* also uses the textual penumbra of literary figures such as Ben Jonson and Kit Marlowe to convey certain implications, as will be seen.

Textual penumbra and performance legacy are referenced both explicitly and implicitly in Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books* (1991). Greenaway

amalgamates the figures of Shakespeare and Prospero by depicting Prospero as a scholar who is composing the action of the play and who initially speaks all the parts himself. John Gielgud brought a textual penumbra to the role that could be said to invoke both figures, as he was a well-established Shakespearean actor. Similarly, this film explicitly references the play's performance legacy. For example its opening credits show a book (presumably *The Tempest*) being passed from hand to hand. Buchanan recognizes this as an acknowledgement of the ongoing process of "textual transmission" that the text had undergone before Greenaway's version (174).

In recreating Prospero as the writer of his own play, Greenaway creates an alignment between Shakespeare the man and the protagonists of his work, a notion utilized by *The Sandman* and also employed in John Madden's *Shakespeare in Love* (1998). This film uses fiction to create a frame that attempts to explain the creation of Shakespeare's plays.<sup>5</sup> *Shakespeare in Love* invents a doomed love affair between Shakespeare and Lady Viola de Lesseps, and relocates his writing of *Romeo and Juliet* as a response to this "star-crossed love." The play's scenes and even specific lines are drawn from the lovers' encounters. Words and motifs flow back and forth between the fictional frame and the play itself. In this way the film provides motivations for many Shakespearean motifs (such as cross-dressing heroines), and redefines our understanding of Shakespeare by addressing the issue of his source material (as drawn from his life experience rather than from folktales or literature).

As such, the Shakespearean performance legacy has often drawn much of its impetus from current cultural conventions. However, many cinematic versions have nonetheless employed the language of his original texts to recreate the plays anew. In so doing, these interpretations have often commented upon the themes of the plays: such as *Dream*'s reality/illusion dichotomy and device of transformation, or *The Tempest*'s analysis of colonial space or authorial control. These productions have similarly used visual coding to create an implicit frame for the play that is both external to its fiction (referencing the play's origins and tradition) and internal (indicating character function and metaphorical meaning). Some later films have even gone one step further and added a more explicit frame that surrounds the plot with another level of fiction that can be used to explore the play's themes. Such variety testifies to the infinite adaptability of Shakespearean drama.

*The Sandman* #19 sustains various themes of *Dream*, the most obvious of which is its reality/illusion debate (see Girard for a full discussion).<sup>6</sup> Even the play's characters cannot agree on whether its events are real or fantastic (*Dream* Vi.1-27), and their disagreement draws attention to this dichotomy. Gaiman's frame of a fantastic audience blurs the lines between reality and illusion still further as events and characters are doubled. These include the

outdoor setting, the mirroring of actor and role (Will Kemp(e)/Bottom), and specific linguistic quirks and events (see Round). As a consequence, the fiction with which Gaiman surrounds *Dream* begins to collapse into it, and in this way *The Sandman* replicates and comments not only upon many of the themes of the play, but also on its structure. For example, the Shakespearean play-within-a-play motif is employed, as *Dream* itself becomes the play within a play, and the breakdown of order that Gaiman's faerie audience create in his production ("THAT IS NOT COWLEY! WHAT'S HAPPENING? WHERE ARE THEY GOING?" [Gaiman, "Dream" 3.22.5]) mirrors the role of Shakespeare's faeries within *Dream*.

Although it appears to transform *Dream*, Gaiman's frame is in fact consistent with the play. While *Dream* is one of the few Shakespearean plays without obvious source material, Shakespeare drew on folklore and myth to create characters such as Titania and the Puck. Critics have concluded that "the names of faeries in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* convey their character and small scale" (Warner 173), and that other plays further reference their small size (for example *Romeo and Juliet*, I.iv.54-64). Yet, as Minor White Latham points out, except for a very few instances, previous to *Dream* "the faeries were never designated as little," and in other literature of the period they are similarly represented as adult-sized (79). By redefining the fey as diminutive, attendant sprites, Shakespeare's *Dream* departed from folk tradition in many ways and its faeries are "not of Shakespeare's time, but of his mind" (Latham 218). Keith Thomas adds, "The faeries of the Middle Ages were neither small nor particularly kindly" (724) and their origins were variously explained as fallen angels, dead souls, or as a third kingdom hidden underground, separate from both heaven and hell (Latham 41). They were shape-shifters (27) and might be aligned directly with ghosts, the devil, or evil beings from classical myth (45-55). They had few striking features (such as wings or similar) and in terms of size were compared to—and often disguised as—adult humans (68). Other legends similarly belie the diminutive and ethereal stereotype by describing the fey as bizarre and ugly (with the caveat that to call them so would result in a curse, hence providing an explanation for their ethereal depiction) (Morrow). Within *The Sandman* series Gaiman in fact supports both views by creating a magical glamour that is customarily worn by his faerie folk to disguise their true forms.

Shakespeare draws upon folk source material to create composite characters such as Puck and Titania; and while Peter Holland notes that "Robin Goodfellow, hobgoblins and pucks all belonged to ... a class of rough, hairy domestic spirits characterized by their mischievousness" (35), both he and Latham confirm that any authority Shakespeare might have had for identifying Robin Goodfellow as a puck, or the Puck, is unknown (Latham 226).

Gaiman accords with Shakespeare's composite, however, using the word "puck" in a generic sense (the character refers to himself as "A PUCK" and also speaks of "WE PUCKS" (Gaiman, *Kindly Ones* 10.2.7), and using phrasing (such as "ho ho ho") drawn from folk songs like "The Ballad of Robin Goodfellow" (Bender 79).<sup>7</sup> Charles Vess depicts the character as animalistic and demonic (red eyes, rough skin, and a grin that shows rather more teeth than is reassuring). In this way the Puck's appearance also accords with folklore—also named "Puck-hairy," he constantly rejects offers of clothes in English folktales and is frequently pictured with a thick pelt of hair (Latham 242-43).

Titania, Auberon, and the Puck, although humanoid, give off an alien air, subtly conveyed by the sidelong perspective and angular lines Vess uses to elongate their profiles (the Puck's head wisps off into nothingness, and the characters' extended ears, Auberon's horns, and Titania's long hair and jeweled headdress further emphasize this). The ethereal air Vess gives to these characters can therefore be viewed as a nod to Shakespeare's reinvention of the British folk faeries for *Dream*.<sup>8</sup> However, the rest of *The Sandman*'s fey are monstrous in both appearance and behavior and as such are visually more reminiscent of British folklore than the Victorian ethereal stereotype, a depiction that is supported by Gaiman's inclusion of Shakespearean quotations that reference this tradition (see Round for further details). Essentially, *The Sandman* #19 returns Shakespeare's faeries to their folkloric roots while remaining within the parameters set by *Dream*'s language.

The interpretation of *The Tempest* offered by *The Sandman* initially appears to transform the play in a similar way. For example, the setting of a peripheral space that is essential to a colonial reading of this play seems subverted by Gaiman's text, which takes as its setting Stratford-upon-Avon—one of the few known elements of the Shakespearean legend. In this sense the comic is located in a domestic space that seems almost antithetical to the play's content. However, by focusing on Shakespeare's day-to-day life, the representation of Stratford we are offered in fact privileges the unknown. Similarly, the introduction of Morpheus's realm (*The Dreaming*) in many senses provides an example of peripheral space (Gaiman, "Tempest" 176.6). In this way the setting, while initially appearing the most banal of realist scenarios, is shown to be a disputed territory of the type that underlies *The Tempest* and its performance legacy (such as *Forbidden Planet*), as noted.

Other elements of the play have parallels in Shakespeare's life. For example, he witnesses two sailors charging drinkers at the village pub for the sight of a dead Indian (Gaiman, "Tempest" 154-55), and later overhears these sailors singing drunkenly. These events are incorporated into *The*

*Tempest* as Stephano's song (II.ii.47-55) and a comment in Trinculo's speech: "when they will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian" (II.ii.31-34). The locals comment that the dead savage "... SMELLS LIKE A FISH! LIKE A SALTED COD'S HEAD!" (Gaiman "Tempest" 154.4) and is a "FINE CODFISH" (155.4), and in this sense recalls the vocabulary of the same scene, where Trinculo comments of Caliban: "What have we here? a man or a fish? dead or alive? A fish: he smells like a fish..." (II.i.24-26), thereby aligning Caliban with the savage. The comic also situates the play's comments on Caliban and Miranda (I.ii.307-312) alongside Tom Quiney's courting of Shakespeare's daughter, Judith (Gaiman, "Tempest" 165), which it later reveals "WAS NOT A HAPPY MARRIAGE" (184.9). It also uses Caliban's comments on language ("You taught me language; and my profit on't / Is, I know how to curse") (I.ii.365-6) as Shakespeare's response to his wife's criticisms (Gaiman, "Tempest" 166.7). In this way the comic draws parallels that variously define Caliban as the savage, the unwanted suitor, and the maligned.

However, Gaiman's rewritten "Tempest" is achieved in quite a different manner. Whereas in "Dream" the play's events are mirrored by the drama that surrounds their performance, "The Tempest" instead demonstrates the ways in which fiction is life transformed, as we are first shown each "real" event, before an illustration of Shakespeare incorporating it into his play. As he comments: "THERE IS SOME OF ME IN IT ... THINGS I SAW, THINGS I THOUGHT" (181.5). Along similar lines, Shakespeare explains how he is all the characters in the play (175.6-176.2), referencing this type of interpretation from the performance legacy of the play. This also invokes the question of authorial control that underlies *The Tempest*. The play's performance legacy situates Prospero as ostensibly controlling the events on the island (although characters continue to plot against him), an interpretation that is emphasized by both Jarman's and Greenaway's productions. Paralleling the author with the magician also enables this play to be considered as a metafiction on the difficulties of literary creation.<sup>9</sup>

In this way, the framing device used to transform the texts reinforces interpretation of the epilogues of both plays. In the concluding pages of Gaiman's "Dream," the events both within and without the play merge. After showing Theseus' closing speech and the Puck's recital of the fairy blessing from Act V, Gaiman's Auberón (instead of Shakespeare's) then speaks, summing the fey to leave the mortal plane (Gaiman, "Dream" 3.22.3). The blurring of story-level content in this way blends notions of reality and illusion completely, and the next page, which depicts the "real" Puck giving the epilogue, may as a result be read either as sheer reality or sheer illusion. This seems aptly suited to this type of Shakespearean epilogue where the actor

both remains in character (in referring to himself as "an honest Puck" [V.i.421]) and also steps outside it (in acknowledging the play's fiction and asking for applause [V.i.428]) (Round 27). This technique is used similarly in "The Tempest," as Shakespeare awakes from his dream to find his play completed—except the epilogue, which he must write "WITH NO MAGIC BUT MINE OWN WORDS" (183.7). The first lines of the epilogue ("Now my charms are all o'erthrown, / And what strength I have's mine own, / Which is most faint") apply equally to both the fiction of the Shakespearean play and Gaiman's framing story. The final words ("... set me free") also recall Shakespeare's release from his pact with Morpheus.

The frame Gaiman uses also transforms the texts through the use of fiction. Shakespeare's son says of his father, "IF I DIED, HE'D JUST WRITE A PLAY ABOUT IT. / 'HAMNET'" (Gaiman, "Dream" 3.13.3), making extratextual reference to the existence of Shakespeare's famous tragedy and the historically documented death of his son in 1596. Although the link between the two is predominantly fictional (see Round) some scholars have theorized that *Hamlet* may in fact have autobiographical links with Shakespeare's life, for example with reference to marriage and infidelity. Similar extratextual comments run throughout Gaiman's "Dream," for example his use of the real setting of Wendel's Mound, the date of the performance, and the actors who make up his company.<sup>10</sup> "The Tempest" also makes similar use of the little we know about Shakespeare's life, such as his friendship with Ben Jonson (157.4), his work on church psalms (170.1), or his "shotgun" marriage to a pregnant Anne Hathaway (150.3). As such, even the fictional elements of Gaiman's frame are not completely antithetical to our understanding of the Shakespearean canon.

However, prefiguring these stories are the events of *The Sandman* #13 ("Men of Good Fortune"), in which Gaiman rewrites the Shakespearean legend to include a Faustian bargain that practically makes Shakespeare into a Marlowe character. In this sense *The Sandman* can also be read as part of the long history of doubt surrounding Shakespeare's work, which dates from 1728 and includes both factional and fictional works.<sup>11</sup> These theories contain some persuasive arguments such as the educational limitations of the man from Stratford and his family, the dates ascribed to his named publications, his entry in the deaths register as merely a "gent" and the lack of elegies, memorials, or any literary possessions or bequests at this time. The Hoffman theory is one of the most striking of these arguments and credits Shakespeare's work to an exiled (rather than murdered) Kit Marlowe.<sup>12</sup> It has also been suggested that the two wrote in collaboration, with Marlowe providing the literary knowledge and Shakespeare the "common touch" (Rubbo). *Shakespeare in Love* also links the two writers creatively (showing Marlowe giving Shakespeare ideas for his script), and in fact goes one step

further by having the character of Shakespeare pretend to be Marlowe at one point (Madden).

Although appearing to support bardolatry in his homage to Shakespeare, Gaiman's frame in fact may be said to subvert it by depicting the Bard as talentless prior to his pact with Morpheus ("Men of Good Fortune" 6.11-12, although this is later belied at "Tempest" 178.6) and providing a source for the two plays most commonly cited as "original" to Shakespeare.<sup>13</sup> In creating their pact, it may be that he is implicitly referencing (and supporting) the Hoffman theory, an observation that is emphasized by Marlowe's presence at the time of their bargain ("Men of Good Fortune" 6.12.1-6) and the alignment of this deal with the themes of his *Doctor Faustus*. However, Gaiman's purpose may be quite different. In naming Morpheus as Shakespeare's co-collaborator and the source for his rewrites of classical stories, perhaps Gaiman is merely offering a more pleasing alternative to the claims made by Hoffman and others and redefining Shakespeare as a divinely inspired genius.

A similar process is apparent in "The Tempest," which instead addresses the relationship between William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. The two certainly knew each other, as Shakespeare's company produced some of Jonson's plays, and Jonson offered a number of critiques of Shakespeare's work, as reported by William Drummond (in the *Hawthornden Manuscripts*) and reiterated by Gaiman ("Tempest" 157.4). However, and although Jonson extolled Shakespeare as a natural genius, he had also commented of Shakespeare that he "wanted art" (Grady 266-67).<sup>14</sup> If this phrase is read (in the sense of *The Tempest*) as "desiring magic/talent" rather than "lacking education/skill," it may be that this comment inspired Gaiman's selection of Jonson to feature in *The Sandman* #75.

Obvious parallels are drawn between Morpheus and Shakespeare (as fathers whose estrangement from their sons leads, in both cases, to their loss), and this is further informed by their connection as storytellers. By approaching *The Sandman* as metafiction some critics have argued that the storytelling link can also be extended to Gaiman. This seems supported by Gaiman's comments on King Lear, which in 1789 is criticized by the character Hob: "THE IDIOTS HAD GIVEN IT A HAPPY ENDING" ("Men of Good Fortune" 6.18.1). However, Shakespeare was in fact the one to change the ending from his source material: both Holinshed and the Mirror for Magistrates restore Lear/Leir to his throne, with Cordelia as his heir (Castaldo). But Shakespeare's tragedy has now become the accepted version and its sources all but forgotten. A similar process can be observed in *The Sandman*, as the golden-age comic on which it was based has been completely eclipsed by Gaiman's reimagining.

In his introduction to *The Sandman: The Doll's House*, Clive Barker comments that "Mr. Gaiman is the Sandman." As a comic about stories and their telling, *The Sandman's* alignment of protagonist and author (whether this function is represented by Gaiman or Shakespeare) allows Gaiman to talk about the creative process. These observations are further enhanced by the inclusion of *The Tempest*, whose alignment of Prospero and Shakespeare can be extended to Morpheus in a similar way. In answer to Shakespeare's question "SO WHY THIS PLAY?" he answers "because I shall never leave my island" and continues "I am ... in my fashion ... an island ..." ("Tempest" 181-82). Again, this refers to the performance legacy of *The Tempest*, which has defined the setting as Prospero's—or the author's—mental landscape.

In this way *The Tempest* can be read as metafiction about the nature of literary creation—Prospero's "art" can be taken as booklearning, and his magic be read as literary creation. Comics writers such as Alan Moore have noted the power of words and their ability to create, following Alistair Crowley in observing the dual meaning of "spelling" and approaching "grimoire" as another way of spelling grammar (Vylenz). This analysis of fiction is also referenced in Gaiman's *Dream*, as the Puck comments on the play, "IT NEVER HAPPENED; YET IT IS STILL TRUE. WHAT MAGIC ART IS THIS?" ("Dream" 3.13.9). In this light, Morpheus's statement "I am prince of stories, Will; but I have no story of my own" (Gaiman, "Tempest" 182.7), although patently false (as evidenced by the very existence of *The Sandman*), is fair comment on the author's role, whose legacy is the fictions he creates. This statement seems particularly suited to Shakespeare, of whose life we know so little.

As such, all three texts may be read as metafiction that deals not only with the creative process and the telling of stories, but also with the transforming power of fiction. Imagination makes impossible things into reality in Shakespeare's wood, where "fancy's images" are transformed into "something of great constancy" (*Dream* Vi.25-26). Prospero's "art" brings the events on the island to pass and restores his dukedom. Over the course of *The Sandman* the eternal and timeless Morpheus discovers he has changed and, although "ENDLESS," is even ultimately enabled to die.

In this way, popular culture versions of Shakespeare have used various framing devices to recreate the play anew. This performance legacy has had an effect on visualization, characterization, and interpretation, whether this has been achieved by foregrounding particular themes, providing the play with a strong historical context, or dislocating it completely from reality. *The Sandman's* reinvention of Shakespeare is based around the plays' original themes, which are sustained by the blend of faction and outright fantasy



that Gaiman uses to create his frame. In this way he also gives his versions metafictional status, and uses the text to explore the power of stories. In so doing *The Sandman* reinvents the plays anew, without the limitations of a themed modernization or contemporary updating. The elements Gaiman retains from their historical context are linked to the plays' themes and hence comment upon their origins and explore their content further, rather than being "factionalized" into a simple "explanation," as seen in metafictional films such as *Shakespeare in Love*.

Not only does this testify to Shakespeare's infinite adaptability, it may also be that *The Sandman* informs discussion of the idea of Shakespeare as literature. As the comic emphasizes, in Shakespeare's day his work was considered popular entertainment rather than elitist. That the same plays are now held in a completely different regard testifies that "literature" may best be defined not as an unchanging, eternal quality, but as a value held at a specific historical moment that is subject to constant change (Derrida 25). The adaptations discussed here have in many instances returned Shakespeare's work to its original context—the realm of popular culture—and in so doing have revived and recreated it for a new audience. *The Sandman* not only rewrites the Shakespearean canon in this way, but fictionalizes its historical background in order to comment on this redefinition. As such, it may be that the boundaries between literature and popular culture are more fragile than we might think.

### Plot Summaries

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* is one of Shakespeare's best-loved plays, whose spectacle and comedy revolve around three interlinked plots. In Athens, the Duke Theseus is preparing to wed the Amazon queen Hippolyta and many festivities are being prepared for the wedding, including a play acted by some very unskilled but enthusiastic local tradesmen (the "rude mechanicals"). Meanwhile, patriarchal citizen Egeus is forcing his daughter Hermia to marry Demetrius, despite the fact that she loves another young man, Lysander, and her best friend Helena is in love with Demetrius. Hermia and Lysander elope, but Helena alerts Demetrius, who sets off in hot pursuit of his intended bride. Helena follows, and all four lovers end up lost in the forest outside the city.

They stumble into a dispute between the fairy king Oberon and his queen, Titania, whose refusal to give up a young pageboy to her husband leads him to plot to humiliate her. Oberon employs the Puck to anoint her eyes with the juice of a certain flower while she sleeps, which will result in her falling in love with the first thing she sees upon awakening. He also

instructs the Puck to do the same to the Athenian man (Demetrius) he has seen berating Helena. Puck places the love-juice on Titania's eyes and arranges things so that she falls in love with Bottom (one of the mechanicals rehearsing in the forest), whose head he replaces with that of an ass. An adoring Titania takes Bottom to her bower and, while so distracted, is persuaded by Oberon to give him the pageboy he desires. However, the Puck mistakes Lysander for Demetrius and anoints both men's eyes—with the result that soon both are professing their love to Helena.

Despite the comedy of this situation, Oberon tells Puck to restore order to Titania, Bottom, and Lysander, although the charm is to remain on Demetrius who now loves Helena. The four lovers return to Athens the next morning with only hazy recollections of their night in the forest and, as there is no longer a dispute over Hermia's affections, Duke Theseus orders a triple wedding to take place; at which the mechanicals perform the unintentionally humorous play "Pyramus and Thisbe." *Dream* closes with Oberon and Titania's blessing on the house and its occupants and a final soliloquy from the Puck.

*The Tempest* is commonly believed to be Shakespeare's last sole-authored play. It tells the story of Prospero, rightful duke of Milan, who was exiled twelve years previously by his usurper brother, Antonio, who had plotted against him together with Alonso, the king of Naples. Prospero, who is extremely learned and a magician, has lived on the island with his daughter, Miranda, and two servants/slaves—the spirit Ariel and the deformed "monster" Caliban, son of the now-dead witch Sycorax, the only non-ethereal inhabitant of the island and, in many senses, its rightful owner.

At the start of the play Prospero summons a storm that causes his brother's ship to crash on the island and divides the passengers and crew so that each group believes the other dead. Three strands of plot then run through the play: in the first, Alonso's son, Ferdinand, meets and falls in love with Miranda, and works for Prospero to earn her love. Prospero eventually relents and allows the two lovers to be together, conjuring a fairy masque for their entertainment. Meanwhile, the slave Caliban encounters Trinculo and Stephano, two drunken crew members, and tries to raise a rebellion against Prospero, which ultimately fails. In the third subplot, the Duke Antonio and his brother Sebastian conspire to kill the King Alonso and his adviser Gonzalo, so that Sebastian can become King. Prospero uses Ariel to thwart this plan and manipulates their course across the island in order to bring them to him.

In the conclusion, all the main characters are brought together before Prospero, who forgives Alonso and Antonio and warns the characters against further wrongdoing. Alonso and Ferdinand are reunited, and all the

characters plan to return together to Italy. Prospero then denounces his magic, breaks his staff, burns his books, pardons the slave Caliban, and finally gives Ariel the freedom he has promised him for so long. *The Tempest* ends with Prospero addressing the audience from this new position, and asking for their applause to "set him free."

### Notes

1. "A Midsummer Night's Dream" was published in September 1990 and was the first and only comic ever to win the Word Fantasy Award for Best Short Story (in 1991, after which the rules were changed to exclude comics from this category).
2. In some trade paperbacks page numbering is retained from individual issues. In these instances I shall cite references as here, where 6.12.3 corresponds to part 6, page 12, panel 3. References given in a two-digit form (for example, 74.5) refers to trade paperbacks where the pages have been renumbered sequentially (page 74, panel 5). When quoting from comics I have used "p" to indicate divisions between speech balloons or narrative boxes and used small capital letters in order to avoid inflicting my own capitalization on the text.
3. Fuller summaries of the plots of these Shakespearean plays are printed at the end of the essay.
4. For the sake of clarity I shall retain the spelling Gaiman uses for his Auberon and other faerie folk (for Gaiman, "faerie" is the abode/adjective only, although the characters themselves are also known as the fey).
5. *Faction* is a blend of "fact" and "fiction" and refers to literature that treats real people or events as if they were fictional, or uses real people or events as essential elements in an otherwise fictional rendition.
6. Some of the following analysis of *Dream* and a fuller discussion of these points can be found in Round, "Subverting Shakespeare?"
7. Also named as "The Mad Merry Pranks of Robin Goodfellow" and popularly credited to Ben Jonson (Paster and Howard 309).
8. Mentions in other Shakespearean plays variously define the fairies as fiends, tempters, or familiars; focus on their powers of bewitchment; and include occurrences of mortal women being mistaken for them (see Latham 177-78 for a complete list).
9. A metafiction is self-referential fiction that deals with the writing of fiction, and thus draws attention to the relationship between fiction and reality.
10. The text is accurate in many respects. For example, Wendel's Mound is a chalk figure located near the village of Wilmington in East Sussex, and "Wilmington" may be derived from "Wendel's Mound Town." The figure is also known as the Long Man of Wilmington or the Wilmington Giant. Similarly, although the exact dates are uncertain, Burbage, Will Kemp(c), Thomas Pope, Henry Condell, and Robert Armin are thought to have worked with Shakespeare (British Library Board). Please see Round for a fuller discussion.
11. These early publications include Captain Goulding's *Essay against Too Much Reading* (1728) and anonymous allegories such as *The Life and Adventures of Common Sense* (1769) or *The Story of the Learned Pig* (1786). Many subsequent texts have theorized that Shakespeare was little more than a pseudonym and have accredited authorship of his plays to Kit Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Francis Bacon, William Stanley, or Edward de Vere. See <http://www.shakespeare-oxford.com/histdoubt.htm> for a complete list, and see Michael Rubbo's documentary *Much Ado About Something* for a more detailed discussion.
12. Although not the first to suggest it, American theater press agent and writer Calvin Hoffman popularized this idea in his 1955 book, *The Murder of the Man Who Was 'Shakespeare'*, now out of print.
13. The other two are *Love's Labour's Lost* (which may have been based on events and people contemporary to Shakespeare) and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. These four texts are

the only Shakespearean plays where the plot does not directly reference an obvious literary or historical source.

14. For example in his poem introducing the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays.

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## 8

# On the Trail of the Butterfly: D. H. Hwang and Transformation

DEBORAH L. ROSS

At some time in our lives, we all want to look or to be different: to transform. Transformation is liberating. It's what makes old cartoons so much fun to watch—objects mutating, boundaries dissolving, more like the world of dreams than of daytime reality. But dreams can also be nightmares, as many Disney cartoons remind us: the animated Alice can't wait to escape from Wonderland. Transformation has its dark side. It all depends on whose is the hand of the artist, who has control, and for what purpose.

Consider the butterfly, a perfect emblem of both the positive and negative potential of transformation. The butterfly is the culminating stage of an organism, not only far more beautiful to the observer than the worm it began as, but, probably, happier in itself, enjoying flight, able to choose which leaf to nibble on, where to light to get the best angle on the world. But the transformation to butterfly is a dangerous one. Despite protective coloration, moving up and out from its birth leaf, it is vulnerable to predators, including envious, greedy, scientific humans with their nets and pins and slides. Even if it escapes these, it is already in the final phase of its short life; immortality carries with it, by definition, a reminder of death.

Stories about butterflies, therefore, can't help commenting in some way about transformation. And when writers transform well-known butterfly stories into new stories of their own, they are in a sense capturing the butterfly, making it signify in accordance with their own vision. David Henry Hwang began writing his play *M. Butterfly* in 1986, after hearing about a French